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ABSTRACT

This paper describes findings of a study that examined several dimensions of school functions--policy making, decision making, structure building, and relation building--to determine how they contributed to or hindered the development of a caring culture in a suburban middle school in a large midwestern city. The study also examined four arenas or domains--curriculum and instruction, extracurricular activities and programs, discipline, and administration--to explore the ways in which caring was reinforced, neutralized, or opposed. Data were gathered through observations; interviews with 27 teachers, 4 administrators, and 8 staff members; document analysis; and a questionnaire. A potential danger is that the organizational goals for academic achievement and a caring culture may come into conflict when one is overemphasized to the detriment of the other. Findings indicate that although some messages countered caring at the school, they were outweighed by those messages that consistently reflected caring teachers, administrators, and support staff. Several social structures provided channels for caring, particularly teaming and the Success Period. Among the major factors that sustained the caring culture were individual teachers' acts and a fairly common language and set of values that supported caring. Obstacles included a new discipline code (which was fragmented and inconsistent), racial tensions, and resistance to outcomes-based education. Although a caring culture had been created and sustained at the school, it was neither consistent nor pervasive. A caring school culture is not just one that values concern for others, it is an effective culture that is able to draw its members together in a common effort to educate based on an ethic of caring. Contains 12 references. (LMI)

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INDIANA UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR ADOLESCENT STUDIES

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The Caring Culture of a Suburban Middle School

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Introduction

Much of the culture of schools and other social institutions is created from the attitudes, values, and interactions of the stakeholders in them. However, these attitudes, values and interactions are shaped to some extent by the policies, decisions, structures and relations through which they are mediated.

In this study of a suburban middle school in a major Midwestern city, we found that although a caring culture had been created and sustained at Suburban, it was neither consistent nor pervasive throughout the school. Among the major factors that sustained this caring culture were the acts of individual teachers, a more-or-less common caring language used by all of the adult groups in the school and values that were supportive of caring. Counterforces included the attitudes of some staff and teachers, racial tensions, and teacher's feelings about outcome-based education.

In the design of our study we proposed to examine several dimensions of school functioning — policy-making, decision-making, structure building, and relation building to determine how they contributed to or hindered the development of a caring culture in the school we studied. In addition we proposed to examine four arenas or domains: curriculum and instruction, extra curricular activities and programs, discipline, and administration to explore the ways in which caring was reinforced, neutralized, or opposed in this school. Given the limitations of this paper, the discussion will concentrate specifically on caring.

Theoretical Framework

As well as being an institution of learning, the expectation that school will be a caring place is deeply embedded in our culture (Goodlad, 1984). In a study of 8500 parents nationwide, Goodlad (1982) found that parents "expect for their children to be in a safe school, to be known by someone in the school and provided with individual attention in both instructional and personal areas (p. 2)."

Students' voices in several studies echoed this expectation and hope for caring schools. From a collection of interviews with youths from schools across America, Shane (1977) identified two things that they sought from schools: 1) coping skills for dealing with a complex world and 2) schools that care about students. Shane noted that the voice of students revealed a loneliness. These youth defined a good teacher as one who is warm and has genuine interest in students. But caring teachers do not work in a vacuum. They are an integral part of the total school culture which may or may not reflect a pervasive ethic of caring.

Definitions of caring are abundant in the literature. Mayeroff (1971, p.1) said that "to care for another person in the most significant sense is to help him grow and actualize himself." Benner and Wrubel (1989, p. ix) defined caring as "an enabling condition of connection and concern." Martin Buber called caring a dialogue "where each participant really has in mind the other...and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living, mutual relationship (Buber, 1965, p. 19).

All of these definitions point to the relational quality of caring. Noddings (1984, p. 17) emphasized this as well when she said that caring is a "way of being in relation, not a set

of specific behaviors." It is important to conceive of caring, then, not merely in terms of behaviors but in terms of an underlying ethic that guides behavior. It is not an abstracted ethic, but one that is based on a sense of connection between persons, situation and context. As an ethic, it is not just extended through behavior, it can serve as a moral foundation for decision-making. As Noblit (1992) suggested, it emphasizes responsibilities and relationships rather than rights and rules. It is most important to note that caring is more than just being concerned for others. As an ethic caring is grounded in specific contexts that influence the actors' ways of being in relation.

Because schools are social organizations, the study of school culture has developed to further understand the complex social phenomena of life in school. Schein (1985) defined culture as "the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken-for-granted' fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment (p. 3)." Beare (1989, p. 173) listed the following characteristics of organizational culture:

--the underlying philosophy/ideology of the leaders and members
--the way this is translated into an operational mission
--the values of leaders and others (within and without who are affected by its operations) and the resonance of these
--the quality of personal/interpersonal actions/interactions
--the metaphors which consciously or unconsciously frame thinking and action
--the sagas, myths, stories, folk heroes and celebrations which serve to generate or bolster motivation

Culture is, therefore, a social construction. This is a hopeful point in that if human beings have created culture, they also possess the power to re-create or direct it towards favorable outcomes. This is the hope of much research on administrative leadership (Deal

1987; Sergiovanni, 1984; Beare, 1989). In turning toward an appraisal of schools, this hope is challenged by the presence of very real problems that seem to cut to the core of school culture and stand as powerful impediments to a culture of caring.

An examination of how caring is integral to the culture of effective schools sheds light on what it means for a school to have a pervasive ethic of caring and the significance of this ethic for all those participating in the effort to enjoy and benefit from life in school.

Methods

Data Collection

A team of three researchers collected the data for the study. We spent over five months in the school on a weekly basis from November 1992 to mid-April 1993. During that time we used four major sources for data collection: observations and field notes, interviews, print material collected at the school, and a paper-and-pencil instrument.

Analysis

The interviews provided the major source of data for the study. The purpose of the analysis was to identify themes or issues around operational arenas that had been previously identified as vehicles for expressing a school's culture: curriculum and instruction, extra curricular activities and programs, discipline, and administration. In addition we examined several dimensions of school functioning — policy-making, decision-making, structure building, and relation building to determine how they contributed to or hindered the development of a caring culture in the school.

Subjects

At Suburban we interviewed a total of 27 teachers, 4 administrators and 8 staff members. Of those 25 were female (23 white and 2 black) and 14 male (12 White and 2 Black), (see table 1).

Table 1. Suburban School personnel - race and gender percentiles

SCHOOL PERSONNEL	#	%	FEMALES						MALES					
			#	%	W	%	B	%	#	%	W	%	B	%
ADMINISTRATORS	4	10	2	50	1	50	1	50	2	50	2	100	0	0
TEACHERS	27	70	17	63	16	94	1	6	10	37	9	90	1	10
PROFESSIONAL STAFF	4	10	3	75	3	100	0	0	1	25	0	0	1	100
NON-PROFESSIONAL STAFF	4	10	3	75	3	100	0	0	1	25	1	100	0	0
TOTALS	39	100	25	64	23	92	2	8	14	36	12	86	2	14

Description of the School

A visitor entering Suburban Middle School encounters the following mission statement hung in the central office:

> "Through teaming and extended learning opportunities Suburban Middle School actively guides adolescents to be successful students and responsible citizens who value learning as a life-long process."

Suburban Middle School is located in a suburb of a major midwestern city. The neighborhood around Suburban can be described as one in transition, with over 30% of the student population moving in and out every year. Although its families represent a wide

range of socioeconomic backgrounds, it mainly consists of blue collar workers who are employed in business and commercial enterprises in the local area or in the city itself.

As the only middle school in the district, Suburban has 1200 students in grades 6, 7 and 8. Of those, 12% are African American bussed in from a poor urban neighborhood as the result of a court-ordered desegregation plan. Another 8% of the students are Appalachian whites from the poorest part of the county.

Leadership at Suburban has changed several times in the last decade. Several of the previous principals have been leaders in state middle school activities. The present principal, although new in the year of the study, is highly regarded by the majority of the teachers. In addition to the principal, Suburban has three vice-principals (including two females one African American).

Suburban has an outcome based education (OBE) philosophy. Posters in the halls, on bulletin boards and in the classrooms describe the desired outcomes. The school is organized into academic teams in which a group of five or six teachers (usually English, math, science and social studies), work with about 140 to 150 students. The members of each team share two preparation periods during which they deal with discipline problems and other issues related to the team.

In the year prior to the study, Suburban scored the lowest in the county on the state achievement tests. As a result, faculty concentrated a great deal of effort and resources in rasing test scores mostly through what were called essential skills -- English and mathematics.

Suburban had established a special period called Success Period to address the affective needs of its students. Success period was a shortened period that was scheduled first thing in the morning and served several purposes: to help students experience and feel successful, to build self-esteem to receive help with their studies, to help them know themselves better, to learn how to develop better relations with others, to make up work, and to develop thinking skills.

Results and Discussion

Since caring was a primary interest, we asked a number of questions about it, but only toward the end of the conversation. We wanted to give interviewees an opportunity to mention it freely in other contexts as well.

Perhaps we should begin with the observation that virtually everyone viewed the school and the vast majority of its adults as focused on caring. There was some variation in the interviewees' abilities to give examples of caring, but many could identify one or more examples. For most people caring came across most clearly in the individual acts of caring that teachers exhibited toward students. One teacher reported the following quotation from a student: "Why is it you believe in us and nobody else does. Why is it other people do not?" The point here is not that only one teacher cared, but that such acts of caring were identified by many teachers, some of whom quoted or cited students. Here are some other examples:

1) A teacher tutored an athlete who was in danger of being dropped from the team for academic reasons.

2) A person reported buying $80 worth of groceries for a family that was in desperate straits.

3) A teacher decided to enroll a girl in after-school activities to keep her away from an abusive step parent until the other parent got home from work. The girl never understood this until years later when she wrote to thank the teacher.

Most respondents had some difficulty separating the acts of individuals from those of the school as an institution. While they viewed the school as caring, they did so largely in the context of individuals doing caring things. Such acts were part of the caring culture of the school, but they did not constitute its whole.

Much of the credit for this caring culture was attributed to its teachers, who constituted the largest group that came in daily contact with students. However, all of the other groups - administrators, counselors, secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers etc., are acknowledged by some and often several, to play a role as well.

We also wanted to know whether caring should be reflected in the formal policies of the school, in its structures or procedures. Many respondents had trouble with this idea. They said things like: "I don't see where it's necessary. . . I don't see how you could mandate it." Another: "I don't think you can reflect that in a formal policy. It's like saying I'm going to pass a law against prejudice." Still another added, "It would be a bit much to put it into language." Later in the conversation, when we offered suggestions of policies that schools might adopt to encourage caring and build a climate for it, the interviewees agreed that policies could provide support for caring. One person even mentioned the change in the discipline policy as a change that was moving in the right direction. Still there is a marked

tendency to see caring in individual terms, to care because one is a caring person not because one is part of a community that believes in and values caring.

In the United States we are so accustomed to thinking of affect and many other things in individualistic terms that we fail to understand the dynamic importance of community, the sense that we are in this together, that we create the world in which we live. It is a failure to understand and reflect upon the significance of culture in our lives. The teams in Suburban know this and practice it at that level. They saw themselves and were seen by others as creating different worlds in which the adult and young lived together according to some set of values. Those we interviewed did not extend the notion of caring to the level of the school community. They did not acknowledge nor act upon a belief in the power of a community of caring which involved students and parents in a flow of caring behaviors.

Suburban's staff believed fully that caring should be reflected in informal interactions and relationships. To many of our respondents, that was precisely what caring was about. One cared because of who one was as a person, and what values one wished to express. A lot of teachers, for example, spoke of treating students with respect. They valued and encouraged student success, and they supported one another as they went about their daily tasks. A few, to be sure, thought this was overdone bordering on the coddling of students, but for most, it was a natural conclusion from what they saw happening every day.

Suburban Middle School was a caring school not just because it had caring individuals in its employ but because it has managed to focus its energies, programs, commitments and resources on caring and a few related values. If the school had a motto, it was some variation of the themes, "Be the best that you can be" or from the teachers' point of view,

"Every child can be successful in school." The latter is especially meaningful when success was defined in academic and non-academic terms such as self-esteem, responsibility, and respect. To understand this mosaic of caring that constituted Suburban's culture we broke it into its separate pieces and analyzed them individually.

We asked respondents about the most important decisions and actions in moving Suburban toward a caring school. We got a wide variety of responses to this question, everything from a grant and staff development programs to services for children. One team developed a unit on homelessness, read articles out of Newsweek about the life of a homeless family, watched the movie *Stone Pillow,* brought in over 700 cans of food, and took a group of students to a downtown mission.

Individual teachers were mentioned. One teacher told us, "I really admire the way Joe and Jane work their tails off to save these kids." (They) put in so much time and are willing to put their neck on the line for the students. (They) get emotionally involved with them to the extent where they end up in tears some days."

Special school programs were also praised for their role in promoting caring. Several people mentioned the recent death of a student (in a fluke accident). The school had adopted a crisis intervention strategy to deal with issues such as this one. Counselors were sent into classrooms and teachers and other school personnel such as custodians were instructed to send children who appeared unusually quiet or withdrawn to the counselors for personal or group counselling. Although there were some problems with the plan (no one could find it when the tragedy first occurred), it was implemented quickly and students were helped to deal with the death of a friend in a compassionate way.

The things we have mentioned thus far were but the tip of the iceberg of suggestions for ways in which the school and its stakeholders expressed caring for students. The many other ideas that were offered included, "the administration believing that a child can be successful" (from a teacher), treating students with respect, the success period, efforts by individual people, staff development programs, the establishment of teams, outcome based education, counselling of students, awards programs (for attendance, good behavior, academics, etc), bulletin boards with caring messages, I-STAR (a drug abuse program) and several others. One teacher went so far as to state "we really work hard with the kids, trying to get them to care about us as teachers and trying to tell them how much we care about them." An administrator asserted, "Kids have to believe that somebody believes in them."

A word of caution is appropriate. While respondents from every stakeholding group (teachers, administrators, support staff, etc.) identified the school as caring and pinpointed specific vehicles for its happening, there was some distance between what they said, which frequently represented a statement of an ideal and what they did in practice, which hinged on the stark reality of their energies, time, and resources. From our observations, programs that appeared well-designed on paper often were far less so when implemented.

When we asked what the most important decisions and actions were that hindered the development of caring in the school, a surprising array of items were offered in four different categories: no hindrances, hindrances already removed, needs that were not yet met, and hindrances still in place. A look at each will suggest the range of views.

Some respondents indicated there were no hindrances to caring that they could think of. A relatively small percentage of people (no more than 10%) offered this view.

Another group of respondents identified hindrances that had already been removed. This group was thinking in positive terms about actions already taken. The implication was, "Don't worry. If we know of any problems, we'll deal with them." The big item in this category was the discipline code which had been recommended for change during the 1991-92 school year and was being implemented in the 1992-93 school year. The shift was from a discipline code that focused on demerits and was administered the same for everyone (one definition of fairness) to a new program which gave teachers and administrators greater flexibility in dealing with different students. Under the new system, repeat offenders might be dealt with quite differently from first offenders. Under the new system suspensions and expulsions had decreased and teachers were given greater responsibility for discipline in the early stages. As problems became more severe (fights, for example) or early efforts did not achieve success, then the administration became more actively involved. The new program was deemed more compassionate by its supporters and less fair (because it didn't treat every child the same) by its detractors.

One hindrance to caring that was still in place, according to several persons, was OBE (outcome-based education) and its concomitants: state tests and essential skills. While there was no formal connection between OBE and the other two items, many respondents, especially teachers, made such a connection in their minds. Because OBE stressed measurable outcomes and because essential skills were one category of measurable outcomes that was included in the state test, the three were frequently linked together.

It is ironic that such linkage was established, for OBE was viewed by some teachers as being a more humane approach to education. Under this program, students could take

tests two or more times, after appropriate remediation, to improve their scores. According to its critics, however, many students didn't try very hard on the first test because they knew they would get another chance. Students who did well on the first test were given enrichment activities which often was just an extension of the same work, while those who did poorly simply went over the same material. Critics of OBE said this simply encouraged laziness, that students were not motivated to do their best. Permissiveness, not compassion, was what OBE represented to them.

The picture was further distorted by connecting OBE to the state test. Since the test was state mandated, emphasized short-term memory and basic skills, many teachers felt hamstrung by its content. Essentially many teachers accused the state test of dictating the curriculum. The broader goals of self-esteem and good citizenship got sidetracked when the test express was on the horizon. These teachers weren't necessarily against the teaching of basic skills, but they resented the heavy-handed way they were thrust upon them. They also felt that other, more important educational goals were ignored or given short shrift in order to teach these essential skills.

Proponents of OBE believed that many of the criticisms could be dealt with adequately through better motivation of students and better enrichment offerings, projects that would really get students excited and motivate them to do well on the first test so that they could quickly get on to more interesting educational ventures. To these advocates of OBE, the state test was a separate issue, one that was mandated by the state and one that was a source of embarrassment to the school and district as well. Except for a large nearby city, Suburban had the lowest test scores of all the middle schools in the county. Critics of OBE

and the state test described low scores as an image problem - how they'd look in the media - rather than an educational problem.

There was no easy and obvious solution to this conflict. Neither group seemed willing to listen to the legitimate points of the other, and both groups seemed fairly well set in their views. This issue spoke to a need, a hindrance in the sense of a void, that some teachers felt was not met: the need for an alternative school for its troubled and trouble making students. Another example of something missing being a hindrance to caring was a new wing for the sixth graders who had recently entered the school. During our study, the sixth graders were housed in the oldest part of Suburban Middle School. This part of the building was old and dark and considerably removed from the rest of the school. This year, for the first time a secretary and an assistant principal have been added for this wing. Last year, if teachers had a problem (e. g.,a fight between two students), they had to take a five minute walk through several long corridors to get help. Since there was no intercom in this part of the building until recently, that added to the problem.

Sixth grade teachers were happier this year, but they still were not completely satisfied and probably won't be until they think of themselves as being on an equal footing with seventh and eight grade teachers.

The lack of a new wing, which is closer to counselors, administrators and other services, was only part of the problem as they saw it. In addition, they were not yet fully teamed, and they did not have the two planning periods - one for individual planning and one for team planning that seventh and eighth grade teachers had.

There was also a sense of isolation. The sixth grade teachers almost felt that they were a different school sharing the same building. Again, until this year the lack of an intercom added to that sense of isolation.

Although all of their concerns were important, the sixth grade teachers seemed to have latched onto the building as a visible symbol of this discontent, and until they are housed in the new part of the building, they probably will never feel totally cared for. Even the new wing itself, if it were not within a short distance of seventh and eighth grade teachers, the administration, counselors, cafeteria, etc., would not completely ease these tensions. The rift was more than physical distance; it represented more the psychological distance between elementary schools and teachers on the one hand and secondary schools and teachers on the other. Even in middle schools there is a greater emphasis on subject matter whereas elementary teachers have always thought of themselves as more focused on the child. In some ways, as John Dewey pointed out many year ago, there is a false dichotomy between the child and the curriculum, but that made its presence no less real to these elementary teachers.

The things we have already discussed represent the major hindrances to caring that our respondents identified, but they were not the only hindrances. Students' families, their poverty and their presumed lack of interest in education was viewed as another obstacle. So too, was the lack of funds.

Despite their idealism and their commitment to caring, teachers did show signs of burnout - some more than others to be sure. While denial might be the initial method of dealing with burnout, frustration was evident both in interview comments and our

independent observations. Frustration was manifest in myriad ways: a sharp tongue, a deep sigh, absenteeism, resignation, resentment, and perhaps at a more advanced stage, a failure to care. When teachers worked as hard as Suburban's apparently did, frustration and burnout were ever-present dangers that must be realized, respected and responded to. While the major emphasis in this study was the school's caring for students, caring for its adults could not be ignored. Suburban's administration might do well to make some new investments in its adults, who need care at least as much as its youngsters do. We should make clear that no adult asked for this, but there was evidence that it was needed.

We were interested in whether caring was embedded in any significant way in curriculum and instruction or in any other aspect of the school's functioning. There were many replies to these inquiries. Some took the position, for example, that it was what they did and how they did it (the medium is the message) that made the difference. The way teachers modeled caring, the way they treated students and the way they responded to the needs they perceived were more important than a change in materials on teaching techniques.

Some did mention specific items under curriculum and instruction. These included the success period, the I-Star program, health class, which dealt with caring to some extent and cooperative learning. Interdisciplinary units on homelessness and war held obvious implications for caring, but we were surprised at the paucity of references to curriculum and instruction in our interviews. Many teachers could not think of anything they were doing in the classroom to introduce children to caring issues and concerns. At the very least, this finding suggested that caring, unlike the state test and essential skills, was not a central focus of the curriculum. Teachers were quick to describe acts of caring that teachers directed at

children, but they found it more difficult to focus their attention on how they would teach children about caring, let alone teach them to care. Indeed some felt that the very process of formalizing caring through the curriculum might render it impotent.

This fits with another finding, that many teachers felt ill prepared to handle the affective curriculum in their classrooms. Their preparatory programs taught them how to teach math or some other subject, not how to teach children to care. While a few attended staff development workshops that were helpful, most had no training whatsoever. According to Suburban's teachers, acts of caring arose naturally out of being human, but teaching about caring did not arise naturally out of being teachers.

Protestations about lack of training might have been rationalizations, of course, for failing to teach theses things and some undoubtedly were, but many teachers seemed genuinely bewildered about how to teach-adolescents to care. One explanation is that we teach what society values (essential skills, for example) and one might reasonably question how much our society values caring.

Stakeholders, who were mostly teachers, did mention other aspects of the school that depict caring. Most of these items did reflect affective goals. Among the specifics were a plaque and a tree that honored the memory of the child who died, help for children who needed clothing, glasses, dentistry or other services, counselling sessions for students with specialized needs, transportation home for students who were ill (apparently the only system in the county that does this), and activities to help the largely black students who were bused from a nearby city to feel part of the local community. Several other specifics were

mentioned, so that it became clear that our respondents could identify a wide variety of things the school did to show students that it cared.

When asked in what ways they, as adults, personally have felt cared for by the school, most had little difficulty in framing a response. They mentioned the support of colleagues, especially those on their team and the assistance and support of the administration. Even the sixth grade teachers, who had felt isolated and cut off in the past, believed that progress had been made in responding to their needs. As one teacher said, "I write notes to my teammates if they've done something special." Many spoke of little things: a candy bar, a card in your box, a note of appreciation.

It may be that the best measure of a school's caring is not so much in what it does for students, important as this is, but in what it does to show its teachers that it cares. It is our belief that giving requires getting, not in the reciprocal sense of tit for tat, but in the more basic sense of discharging and recharging our batteries. Without regular recharging, we lose the power to care. The adults in this school - secretaries, custodians, aides, and teacher - felt cared for. Even administrators spoke of other adults who had performed loving acts, acts of caring, by way of reassuring them that they were appreciated.

What could be done right now to make the school more caring? The assumption behind this question was that one didn't need to be sick to get better. The responses to this question were no different in any tangible way from the prescriptions already given. Training was the opportunity for teachers to continue to grow was emphasized. Apparently a grant provided such opportunities to many teachers three or four years ago. From this experience

they learned the value of continuing education. Despite such opportunities the need had not been fully met, and ideally, never would be.

What about consistency? Were the various stakeholders hearing consistent messages about caring or was there enough inconsistency to produce confusion. For the adults, with a few exceptions, the message seemed consistent: "I care for others and others care for me." Each person seemed to have a support group that was rooted in the team or some other small coterie of friends.

For students consistency was less certain. While they might have felt that teachers cared in the abstract, individual acts of caring might be misunderstood or understood from the shaky platform of adolescence. Even under the best of circumstances, the recipients of caring were unlikely to perceive such acts with the same clarity as the agents offering it. Moreover, mixed motives might be suspected. Did Mr. Blank do this out of his own need for order or was I really being that interruptive of the class. Sometimes the misperception might have more to do with the way in which the message was delivered than the actual content of the message. Messages did not get delivered in a vacuum, the sender and receiver had a history to their relationship and the messages were delivered in the context of that history. Benign intent often was interpreted as your way right away.

Here is a brief piece of dialogue that illustrated a difference in perspective. This adult had the child's point of view in mind (S is staff member; R is researcher)

S: And another thing. One that really stands out for me is once the child has gotten in trouble and done something, it just seems like they never forgive

R: You mean he's marked. And it seems like he keeps getting in trouble.

S: Yes. Yes. It doesn't seem like they forgive. And that child just keeps on getting in trouble because they don't have that caring feeling about them.

The reference to "them" was unclear. It could have been a reference to some teams or some teachers. What was clear was the perception that the history of interactions between teachers and children did color future interactions. It was easy to rationalize that one was doing this for the good of students, but when students failed to see the good, even if he/she did see it ten years later, the action still offered a counter-caring message in the present.

Taking into consideration our interviews and observations, while there were some indications of messages that countered caring, they were outweighed for the most part by those messages that consistently reflected caring teachers, caring administrators caring counselors, and caring support staff. As one administrator concluded, "I really think . . . teachers, custodians, etc., really do like and value kids." This message came through most clearly in words, and, as with all of us, less clearly in actions. But overall the school and its staff came across as one that cared.

Conclusion

We found that while there were some indications of messages that countered caring at Suburban, they were outweighed for the most part by those messages that consistently reflected caring teachers, caring administrators caring counselors, and caring support staff.

The school was seen by respondents as a place for individual adults to perform caring acts for individual students. Few of them viewed the school as a caring community in which all shared as donors and recipients. This distinction is an important one if the faculty and administration wish to imbue the school with an ethos of caring. By analogy, paint can be applied to the surface of a plastic or embedded in it throughout. The latter represents more the idea of a caring community.

Suburban had its clearest sense of academic mission in relation to improving essential skills and raising test scores. Few other academic goals — e.g. improving critical thinking skills — were even mentioned, and none had attained a consensus status. The academic curriculum, faculty and committee meetings, and extra curricular activities were on balance neither supportive nor hindering of caring. Goals for the affective curriculum were fragmented. Included were such things as self-esteem, respect, tolerance, cooperation, life skills, self-discipline and conflict resolution skills, but there was no consensus on any one of these as a primary goal. While caring was mentioned frequently as something adults did for children, it was rare to have it suggested as something students should be taught. Teachers modeled it, of course, so it was offered as something to be caught rather than taught.

Our review of the literature suggested that there is no essential conflict between achievement and a caring culture, but the two can come into conflict when one is overemphasized to the detriment of the other. While this was not the case at Suburban, it was a potential danger. Since Suburban's students were perceived to be unusually needy, there was a tendency for teachers to substitute caring for achievement as their primary

responsibility. Teachers seemed to feel that helping students to achieve a broad variety of goals — not just higher test scores — was a sincere form of caring.

A new code of discipline gave the appearance of being more humane, but its fragmentation, lack of consistency and resistance to it by some faculty weakened its intended purpose. Racial tensions and to a lesser degree outright racism posed a serious threat to caring especially for bussed (black) students. Several social structures provided channels for caring. Teaming was by far the most successful vehicle for doing this, but it also had its problems. The Success Period held tremendous potential for supporting a caring culture, but this potential was largely unrealized. It served too many purposes, some teachers felt uncomfortable with it and teachers were insufficiently trained in its use. Many teachers viewed outcome-based education as a negative feature of life at Suburban. However, it was described as inimical to caring only in the context of the Success Period, where teachers thought it siphoned time from its original purposes. Relations among faculty, staff, administration and students at Suburban appeared to be quite positive. They reached the level of caring most convincingly in the context of teams.

Teachers' views of child development and their philosophy of education were very diverse. Diversity of gender, race, experience too can be a strength when its anchored around a core of essential values and beliefs, but this did not appear to be the case at Suburban.

Educational Importance

Although there is little specific research on the culture of schools in terms of caring, there is an important link between the culture of schools and the ethic of caring. Caring occurs in a social context. Some literature points to the impediments to caring in the context of schools suggesting that there are aspects of the culture of schools that inhibit the establishment of a caring ethic. Research on effective schools, however, shows how the development of a caring ethic is possible and central to effective schools.

One of the impediments to the development of an ethic of caring in schools was identified by Noblit (1992) as the lack of a language of caring. However, from the research on effective schools, it seems that an ethic of caring is fostered by developing the culture through a number of strategies of which speaking of caring is only one. In other words, it is not clear whether the real impediment to caring is a lack of language for discourse or simply ineffective culture building in other areas. Another conclusion to be drawn is that caring school cultures may not look the same but they will have some similar qualities. They may or may not be democratic. They may or may not make caring a direct subject in the curriculum. However, the qualities that constitute caring, connectedness, commitment and community, are found in the culture of caring schools.

Finally, it should be noted that effective school leaders are both task-oriented and caring (administrators and teachers). Whereas these leaders may have the predominant tendency in school to focus on standards or caring (most likely the former), these do not necessarily stand in conflict. Whether they are in conflict or not seems to have more to do with the ethos of the school than anything else. Thus, a caring school culture is not just one

that values concern for others, it is an effective culture that is able to draw its members together in a common effort to educate based on an ethic of caring.

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